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SUBJECT: TURKEY: MILITARY VS. OPPOSITION PART DEUX (THIS
TIME IT'S PERSONNEL)

REF: A. ANKARA 1391

[B](#). ANKARA 430

[C](#). ANKARA 475

Classified By: Pol-Mil Counselor A.F. Godfrey, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Turkish military and the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) recently entered into their second public clash in six months. On August 5, CHP Parliamentary Group Deputy Chairman Kemal Kilicdaroglu publicly criticized the Supreme Military Council's (YAS) decision not to dismiss any officers for engaging in religious activities this year (ref a), accusing the government of bribing and/or blackmailing the military in order to prevent such dismissals. The CHP's accusations drew a sharp response from the TGS, which issued a lengthy press statement later that day refuting CHP's allegations and calling them "shameful" and "based on fantasy." The presidency also responded by rejecting allegations that President Gul had threatened to veto any dismissals based on anti-secular activities. This latest episode resembled the rift between the TGS and CHP in March 2008, when the CHP accused the Turkish military of withdrawing from northern Iraq prematurely due to U.S. pressure. CHP's apparent efforts to bolster its credentials as the flag bearer for secularism may instead further strain its relationship with the military, an important secularist ally, while undercutting the party's support from some of its pro-military base. End summary.

Point - Counterpoint

[1](#)2. (U) CHP Parliamentary Group Deputy Chair Kemal Kilicdaroglu claimed on August 5 that the August 4 YAS decision not to expel any officers for religious activities was the result of a threat that President Gul would veto any attempts to expel officers for anti-secularist activity. Kilicdaroglu also suggested that the military may have been "bribed" by the government to not expel officers with a religious view. He alleged that the government bought an expensive armored vehicle for soon-to-be-retired CHOD Yasar Buyukanit ahead of the YAS, portraying the car as a bribe in return for the military not expelling officers at the YAS, and a reflection of the increasing coziness between the military and the government.

[1](#)3. (U) CHP Deputy Chairman Mustafa Ozyurek joined the battle and submitted a written question to Prime Minister Erdogan asking why there were no dismissals announced by the YAS at the August 4 meeting. He called the lack of dismissals a historical anomaly, noting that this was the first time since

1966 that no officers were dismissed by the YAS. Ozyurek also asked whether a connection existed between the YAS decision and the Ergenekon crime investigation, suggesting that the TGS did not push to dismiss officers who have expressed their religion in inappropriate ways (attending mosque in uniform or having a wife who wears a turban are examples of offenses that can lead to dismissal) in exchange for the government backing off on the Ergenekon investigation that has led to the arrest of a number of retired military officers (including two four-star generals who remain under custody) and implicated a number of active duty officers.

¶4. (U) TGS reacted quickly, issuing a sharply-worded statement on the same day dismissing CHP's allegations. The statement stressed that the TGS will continue to expel any officers involved in illegal activity, but pointed out that any illegal activity must undergo investigation, and that dismissals would take place only after the investigations have been completed. The statement said the vehicle was an official vehicle purchased by the government for Buyukanit because four attempts were made on Buyukanit's life during his two-year tenure as CHOD. The statement characterized Kilicdaroglu's allegations as "an effort to take political advantage of the Turkish military" and "shameful." The Office of the Presidency also released a statement denying claims that President Gul had threatened to veto any YAS dismissals. Kilicdaroglu refused to back down, calling the statements from the TGS and the presidency "baseless" and "full of contradictions" at an August 6 press conference. He also demanded that the brand (Audi A8) and price of the vehicle be made public. When asked about CHP's criticism of the military on this issue, CHP leader Deniz Baykal said his

party would not have objected if similar vehicles had been bought for Buyukanit's predecessors as well.

The Reality?

¶5. (SBU) In a press interview published in Zaman newspaper on August 8, an anonymous high-level government official said the government and TGS agreed not to expel anyone from the YAS to avoid speculations that those dismissed were tied to Ergenekon. The official also said part of the reason for the deferment was the government's desire to move forward with the EU harmonization process. According to the source, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) is planning to introduce a provision to subject decisions of the YAS to judicial review as part of a broader constitutional reform package. The source claimed that the military and government will discuss 38 members of the military recommended for dismissal at the next YAS, scheduled for November 30 through December ¶1. While we have not been able to independently verify the information contained in this interview, a number of embassy contacts have indicated that TGS may consider using military courts to expel officers that have engaged in "anti-secular" activities in order to prevent politics from "interfering" with the military imposing discipline within its ranks. Contacts tell us TGS opted for this accommodation as a gesture to reduce tensions so soon after the July 30 court decision not to close AKP.

Second Skirmish

¶6. (U) This is the second time that the CHP and TGS have crossed swords publicly this year. Following the conclusion of cross-border operations in February 2008, CHP's Baykal was among the fiercest critics of the military's decision to end its cross-border operation into northern Iraq, accusing the military of caving to U.S. pressure shortly following Secretary Gates' visit to Ankara. The TGS responded harshly to those accusations, calling the attacks on the military's decision &more harmful than traitors8 (refs b and c). Prime Minister Erdogan came to the military's defense at that time, applauding the troops for conducting a successful mission in a March 4 AKP parliamentary meeting and challenging the opposition to address complaints to the government instead of the armed forces.

Comment

17. (C) By going after the military leadership again the CHP may be trying to bolster its claim to be the flag-bearer of Ataturk's legacy and the primary defender of Turkey's secular identity. However, this latest attack, which targeted the popular Buyukanit personally, will more likely cost CHP some support from its pro-military base and allow AKP the political optic of appearing to stand by the top brass. This exchange also seems likely to aggravate CHP relations with the military just as the new TGS leadership prepares to take up their duties.

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